

## IDAHO SPOKESMAN REVIEW

### **Statewide 2-year college system proposed; NIC would be part of four-school entity funded by the state under Idaho Falls representative's plan**

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BOISE – An eastern Idaho lawmaker has proposed a statewide community-college system to increase the number of students in the state who continue their education past high school. Rep. Ann Rydalch, R-Idaho Falls, is drafting a bill for the 2006 Legislature that would put as many as four community colleges under state control.

Idaho has had traditionally low numbers of students who make the transition from high school to college. About half of state high-school graduates attend some kind of post-secondary school.

"My whole goal is to get more kids going from high school to college," Rydalch said.

Her proposed system would include the two existing community colleges – the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls and North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene – as well a proposed two-year school in Canyon County and the existing Eastern Idaho Technical College in Idaho Falls.

Rydalch envisions a system in which the state picks up the tab. Currently, North Idaho College and the College of Southern Idaho rely on local property taxes for a portion of their funding, while EITC is fully state funded.

The Legislative Budget Office is looking into the cost of Rydalch's proposal.

"I don't want to raise taxes," Rydalch said of her bill.

Idaho's historically low number of college-bound students may be due in part to costs in a state where wages rank 45th among the 50 states, said State Board of Education member Blake Hall. In addition, many students are unprepared for university curriculum right out of high school, Hall said.

Expanding the state's system of community colleges, which are cheaper than four-year schools and offer basic, entry-level classes, could help fill the gap, he said.

"My preliminary view is that it is the state's best interest to have a community college system," Hall said.

Still, legislators from districts that have community colleges are skeptical about shifting control to bureaucrats in Boise, saying that having a local governing board allows quick response to fiscal crises.

Sen. John Goedde, R-Coeur d'Alene, who is chairman of the Senate Education Committee, said he also fears that a community college system funded entirely by the state could face the same challenges as other state agencies during lean budget years.

"Are we going to end up lowering the funding for the entire community college system?" Goedde said.